



File Code: 1950/2810

Date: April 23, 2014

Dear Interested Party:

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is planning the Crockett Lake Whitebark Pine Demonstration Project in the Gravelly Mountains south of Ennis, Montana. The project site is located in the Upper Ruby and Wigwam-Cherry management areas and is between the Cherry, Gravelly and Warm Springs drainages of the Gravelly Range Mountains along the Gravelly Range Road. The project is about one mile south of Crockett Lake and 20 miles south of Ennis, Montana in T9S, R2W, Section 5.

The proposed treatment is intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of conifer slashing to reduce competition with conifers, increase sunlight to promote whitebark pine reproduction and reduce the risk of losing whitebark pine in the event of a wildfire. All conifer trees within 66 feet from any existing whitebark or limber pine tree would be cut, piled and eventually burned in a 30 acre project area. The project will open up space in patches of existing whitebark pine trees to reduce competition with other conifers and increase sunlight to promote whitebark pine reproduction. Approximately 30% (10 acres) of the project area is anticipated to be treated. Cutting and piling would be done by hand crews with chainsaws. This project will also reduce the risk of losing whitebark pine in the event of a wildfire, as occurred in 2013 when a genetically unique stand of whitebark pine in similar, crowded conditions was lost in the Eureka Fire just south of the project area. Activity would occur during the summer and fall months when the road is open to wheeled vehicles and all travel restrictions would be followed.

The project is within two inventoried roadless areas (IRA). The Sheep Mountain IRA is on the west side of the Gravelly Range Road and the Cherry Lakes IRA is on the east side of the road. Removal of conifers will take place immediately adjacent to the Gravelly Range Road and the total treated area would be less than 30 acres. No off-road vehicle travel would occur in the IRAs. The proposed actions within the IRAs in this project are consistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (294.13(b)(1)(i); 294.13(b)(2)) because the cutting and burning of generally small diameter timber will maintain or improve Whitebark pine which is currently a candidate species.

A preliminary assessment of the potential effects of the proposed work was done by Forest Service specialists, and it is projected that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would result in significant effects on the quality of the human environment, including roadless characteristics or wilderness attributes.

Comments on this proposal are invited and encouraged. No decision has been made yet. This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names, postal and email addresses, and phone numbers of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. To help us address your concerns in a timely manner, please submit comments by **May 22, 2014**. If you do not have comments at this time, but want to remain informed about the project, please contact us.



Written comments should be mailed to: District Ranger, Madison Ranger District, 5 Forest Service Road, Ennis, MT 59749, Telephone (406) 682-4253 / FAX (406) 682-4233, Email your comments to: comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge@fs.fed.us. Please type "Crockett Whitebark Pine Demonstration" in the subject line. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Acceptable electronic formats include email text (i.e. ASCII text or html) and Word or PDF documents. The district office is open from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday excluding federal holidays for hand-delivered comments.

Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) title of project on which the comments are being submitted; and 3) specific facts and supporting information for the responsible official, Dave Callery, Acting District Ranger, to consider. If you would like more information, please call Paul Roose at the Madison Ranger District Office (406) 682-4253.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dave Callery
DAVE CALLERY
Acting District Ranger

Enclosure